



# KAmeriCorps Keepers of the Land



Community Newsletter

Spring Summer 2006

Issue 6



## New Marketing Approach Shows One-On-One Benefits For Programs

by Chris English

One of the hardest things a person can attempt to do is inspire others to a certain activity or cause. For many years, AmeriCorps interpreters have struggled with this issue in recruiting park goers to attend their various programs.

Recently, AmeriCorps member, Nick Blay, came up with a new way to get people excited about attending his programs. His unique approach to marketing these programs just may be a way to help solve this longtime challenge

many parks educators throughout the nation face.

Blay, a junior in biology at Simpson College in Indianola and interpreter at Lake Manawa State Park during the summer of 2006, came up with the idea of staging impromptu presentations to give park visitors a taste of what they could learn more about by attending his programs and to offer one-on-one interaction with park visitors. Such presentations included Blay taking a random artifact from somewhere in the park and explaining a

little bit about the item and the role it plays in the park. The change in audience turnout soon became obvious.

"When I do stuff I try to be enthusiastic about it and make it seem like it relates to everybody,"

Blay said.

Blay's supervisor, John Maehl, said he and other supervisors usually forewarn their interpreters each summer of the challenge they will face when trying to get people to come to their programs.

"In the past we had some quality interpreters that would put together great programs but they wouldn't market them all that well. Nick's innovation really was in getting people to attend his programs," Maehl said.

Instead of presenting topics that people would already know about, Blay made it a point to have his impromptu presen-

tations feature a unique item that piqued peoples' curiosity.

Such items might have included things like a special rock artifact or a small animal or reptile species. All the presentation items and animals were collected or trapped by Blay himself. Maehl said eventually

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# AMERI ROACH MOTEL

## AmeriCorps Member uses household pests to drive youth programming

by, Chris English

Cockroaches are king of all creepy insects! There aren't many people who can readily say that they have never been scared of these creatures one time or another. Thankfully, with programs made possible by AmeriCorps members, more people can come to respect and appreciate these and other creepy critters.

Kari Fisher, junior in animal ecology at Iowa State University, has served as an interpreter for two summers at Green Valley State Park in Union County. She also has the distinction of being the first person to assume an interpreter's role at the park and the first to offer cockroach programs.

During her time at

Green Valley, Fisher completed a number of programs geared toward teaching kids about creatures native to the park yet not usually thought of. Alan Carr, Park Ranger at Green Valley State Park, found the experience to be very entertaining. He noted that Kari's success with her programs, especially in using cockroaches, provided a lot of groundwork for future interpreters to follow at Green Valley.

Carr also said that because of Kari's success, she was given few restrictions on the ways in which she needed to implement her programs.

"She usually did a program every Friday and Saturday. We just kind of left it up to her to kind of pick what she wanted to do," Carr said.

Over time, however, Kari found that she was able to make a special connection with the kids coming to her programs, using live, hissing cockroaches to pique their attention.

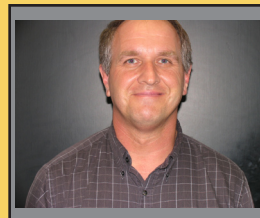
"I could use them a lot

for bribery to encourage program attendance, especially for kids."

If any of the kids were afraid of them at first, Kari said they would soon come around to the idea that they were not

see "Roaches" page 3

## MEET THE NEW AMERICORPS MEMBERS!



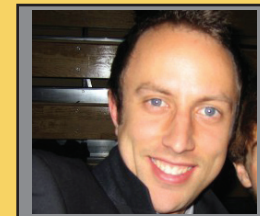
**Pat Weber**

Wallace State Office Bldg.

Protected Water Areas Assist.

Adel, IA

Pat Weber brings plenty of experience to AmeriCorps. After graduating from Iowa State University in 1987 he began working in various conservation programs, the most recent being Dallas Soil and Water Conservation District in Adel, Iowa and then with the Iowa Rural Water Association. Weber hopes to gain more experience and broaden his skills as an AmeriCorps member. "This is a great organization and I see a lot of friendly faces around the workplace," he said.



**Julian West**

Wallace State Office Bldg.

Water Trails Assistant

Grinnell, IA

Julian is a guy who knows what he wants. After recently graduating in May, he has wasted no time in preparing himself for his next big step: law school. With the hopes of studying environmental law, West has chosen AmeriCorps as the way of getting involved and start the networking process. "This is a great opportunity for me to learn the environmental players in Iowa and just learn more about the state of Iowa," West said.

*Kari Fisher, interpreter at Green Valley State Park, focused heavily on educating kids with creepy critters native to the park*







## Roach Motel Continued

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harmful.

Discovering that their mothers were more afraid of the cockroaches, the kids soon began to relent on their own fears. Kari noted that the kids liked the idea of being braver than their parents.

Not only did kids soon establish themselves as audience regulars at Kari's programs, but the cockroaches soon began establishing a home for themselves as well and started multiplying in great numbers.

"It started out with four cockroaches at the beginning of the summer and about halfway through the summer I had over 60 of them," Kari said.

Kari found herself learning new things about the roaches along with the kids when she found out that just feeding and providing shelter for her little creatures wasn't going to cut it. Eventually, she learned that she would need to keep them separated from each other in order to even keep them alive.

This is due to the fact that male cockroaches become very territorial when they feel that other

roaches are invading their personal space. The common result of this behavior is cannibalism.

Kari found this out when she came to work one morning and noticed that 12 baby cockroaches had come up missing.

"I knew they weren't getting out. So I counted them and asked 'ok, where did they go?' So I started doing some research on the internet and thought to myself, oops!" Kari said.

Suddenly she had a science project as well as an interpretation prop.

Eventually the summer came to a close and Kari's programs ended. Before she could leave the park and head back to school she was told by a number of slightly intimidated park officials she would need to find homes for all the roaches away from the office.

"We said to her at the end of the summer, 'when you go, they go' and as far as I know they've all got homes," Carr said.

Kari remarked that while she did find homes for the roaches, it was not too far away from the park offices in case the next interpreter would



**Drew Kuckler**

Lk. McBride/Pleasant Creek

Ecosystems Management

Cedar Rapids, IA

With already having an array of conservation management under his belt, Drew Kuckler decided to join AmeriCorps as a way to take his skills to the next level. Looking for even more experience and responsibility Kuckler is taking on the daunting task of restoring Iowa prairie lands in both Lake McBride and Pleasant Creek State Parks. Kuckler is positive about this upcoming challenge saying that he wouldn't have it any other way. "I could not stand being in an office all day, I'd much rather be out here," he said.



**James Graham**

Parks & Recreation Areas

Ecosystems Management

Bettendorf, IA

James Graham will be working with the ecosystems management crew traveling throughout Iowa during the winter of 2006-2007. He will be assisting other AmeriCorps members in invasive species clearing and trail management duties. Graham recently represented AmeriCorps at the 2006 National Trails Symposium that took place in the Quad Cities.

need to use them in the future.

"I was able to find a volunteer to watch after them. There will definitely still be some that will survive and be ready for next summer," Kari said.

*Do you or someone you know have an interesting AmeriCorps story? Contact Chris English at 515.281.4832 and get your story in the upcoming newsletter!*



**Brenda Vargas**  
**Brushy Creek**  
**Prairie Resource Specialist**  
**Des Moines, IA**

Brenda Vargas comes to AmeriCorps with very unique expectations of her tenure of membership. Brenda plans to build upon her AmeriCorps experience by going back to graduate school to study ecology with a specialization in primates. When asked why such a diverse interest in wildlife and natural resources she said that without places such as the prairie lands, other wildlife cannot exist which is why it is so important that we study and protect both.



**Kelly Redding**  
**Brushy Creek State Park**  
**Interpreter**  
**Ames, IA**

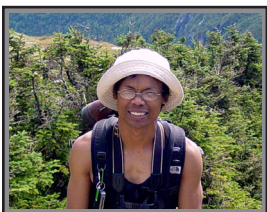
Kelly returns to AmeriCorps for a second term after having participated in a three month seasonal interpretative role at Ledges State Park. Her work this term deals specifically with prairie management tasks such as seed cleaning and planting this winter at Brushy Creek State Park. "I'm a northern girl, so I LOVE winters," Kelly said. Kelly was sited at Brushy Creek in the hopes of incorporating some programming for local youth, an aspect not yet established at the park.



**Luke Wright**  
**Parks & Recreation Areas**  
**Ecosystems Management**  
**Ames, IA**

Working with water trails is what he loves and is the reason why Luke Wright decided to return for a second term. Working hard to coordinate the 2007 Project AWARE cleanup, Luke is definitely in a place where he belongs. "This is the real thing for me, it's a dream come true," Luke says in regard to his passion for Iowa's on-going river cleanup efforts.

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



**V Pierce**  
**Environmental Educator**  
**1999 - 2002**

The importance of every AmeriCorps member and their commitment to service is a fact that largely goes without saying. However, occasionally it becomes appropriate to shed some light on the few individuals who continue "getting things done" long after their term of service has ended.

'V' Pierce originally came to AmeriCorps in 1999 following a stint with the Peace Corps. Beginning his first year as trail crew member

and later as an environmental educator at Springbrook State Park's Conservation Education Center, Pierce completed a total of three years with AmeriCorps before moving on to pursue a career that continued to deepen his environmental passion. While performing his duties as a member, Pierce also attended Iowa State University where he graduated with a degree in Fisheries & Wildlife.

Pierce's work dealt mostly with creating educational programs for youth at local

schools and YMCA in the Ames and Boone area.

Pierce now works as a Lead Naturalist for the Northwoods Stewardship Center in Vermont.

Pierce says he has enjoyed both experiences with working with AmeriCorps and his current career because they are such rewarding opportunities.

"I tell people that I look for opportunities in areas I enjoy. In finding them, I feel like I come to play, not work, and whatever I do comes from the heart."





## SUMMER PICS!



Ecosystem Management team members (left) take a break from the summer heat; Labyrinth exhibit (top) constructed with the help of DNR AmeriCorps members at the 2006 National Trails Symposium in the Quad Cities; Ecosystem crew member, Nate Wieting, (right) poses for a picture on his favorite set of wheels



## NEW MARKETING APPROACH

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Blay would receive help from other park staff in collecting various items for him to use.

"We have half a bay in one of our shop garages dedicated to the storage of all the props and visu-

cant increase in program attendance. Along with this, Maehl said the program quality definitely reflected his marketing concept and Nick never faltered in bringing about the understand-

*"When I do stuff I try to be enthusiastic about it and make it seem like it relates to everybody,"*

*- Nick Blay, Interpreter*

als aids and stuff. It gets to be kind of fun to see that stuff collect over the summer."

Blay's strategy took effect early, with park officials noticing a signifi-

ing and awareness they had hoped people would learn.

"He's passionate about the information and [AmeriCorps] was really more than a job to him,"

Maehl said. "He had a real interest in conveying that passion and sharing it with others."

Blay said that part of the reason he feels so strongly about his work reverts back to his love of reptiles and people's perceptions of a commonly intimidating species of animal.

"I'm a snake enthusi-

ast. I think they're probably the greatest animals out there; that's just my opinion. A lot of people are afraid of them and if I can switch their fear to interest, then I think I'm providing an important service."



Nick Blay, interpreter at Lake Manawa State Park, makes use of park artifacts as part of his programming style





## GUEST COLUMN: Filling the Void

by Alan Carr, Park Ranger  
Green Valley State Park  
AmeriCorps Site Supervisor

A state park is a busy place, especially during the summer. Full time as well as several part-time staff keep busy with the day to day operations of the park as well as responding to the immediate needs of the public utilizing the facilities.

During the “off season” we are able to conduct a variety of environmental education and informational programs to school

students and other groups in the community.

However, during the summer it’s difficult to respond to all the requests we get for programs. So, a couple of years ago when we were able to add an AmeriCorps member as an interpreter in the park, it filled a void in summer environmental programming. The AmeriCorps member was not only able to address the requests for programs from the community, but also

initiate a campground educational program.

The ability to have an environmental education program in the park is vital to get park users to “connect” with the park. It’s important for the public to understand that every state park is their park. Not in the sense that they can do whatever they want to in the park, but in the sense that they are part-owners of something that is held in the public trust for themselves and ev-

eryone else to visit and enjoy. They also have a responsibility to help maintain it, not only for their own use but also for the next generation. An AmeriCorps member as an interpreter in the park helps accomplish these goals and educate the public in a positive manner with a variety of environmental programs and activities.

While people of all ages enjoy learning about na-

see **Void** page 7

## SUMMER PICS!



*AmeriCorps members kept busy this summer helping with events like the Lake Manawa Race (bottom) and the Council Bluffs Pride Week Parade (left) a success; (right) AmeriCorps members huff it up a hill during a prairie restoration day in Saylorville, IA*



**Brock Phillips**

**Location**

**Habitat Specialist**

**Manchester, IA**

Working in cold environments is nothing new to Brock Phillips. He comes to AmeriCorps after spending three years working for Linn County Conservation and eventually in Alaska working as a volunteer fish technician studying and researching the local salmon population. Back in Iowa, Phillips hopes to put his skills to the test as a full-time DNR technician either in Iowa, Minnesota, or Wisconsin. Serving AmeriCorps is a valuable opportunity in obtaining his career aspirations



**Dustin Eighmy**

**Mount Ayr Wildlife Unit**

**Resource Aide**

**Mount Ayr, IA**

Like most AmeriCorps members, Dustin Eighmy is excited to be a part of an opportunity that will be experienced by many future generations. "It's nice to know that I am here to help preserve what we have and help reduce additional destruction," Eighmy said. Keeping with his fascination of wildlife, Eighmy hopes to one day live in Wyoming or Montana and continue his work with native wildlife.

Welcome all new members to the Keepers of the Land AmeriCorps program. We thank you for your good service and your contribution to bettering Iowa's environment. We wish you great success!

...Void continued from page 3

ture, kids are especially interested. They are naturally curious and eager to learn how things work. Programs and activities that get the kids involved as well as teach them something about their environment will have lasting effects. Through environmental education programs we can help instill in our children the

knowledge of how natural systems function, an appreciation for nature and respect for the land. The kids enjoyed and learned from our interpreter's programs and hopefully some of those experiences will become memories that these kids will carry into adulthood. As adults, it is our hope that maybe they will become supporters of our parks and natural resources.

AmeriCorps members as interpreters in the state parks are helping to fill a void that has been absent from most state parks since the days of the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression. Each year, the interpretive program is becoming better and better as it continues to develop. As park users get used to having environmental programs as another recreational op-

portunity they are bound to become more popular and enhance the users' experience in the park. This is a win-win situation. The AmeriCorps member gains vital work experience while providing an important and needed service to the public.

*If you would like to contribute to the AmeriCorps Newsletter, contact Chris English at 515.281.4832*





A special thanks goes out to all the previous AmeriCorps members who served during 2005-2006 and are now moving forward with their prospective careers. Your contributions to AmeriCorps, the DNR and Iowa's natural resources are invaluable. We wish you the best in all your future endeavors.



**Ross Baxter**

Ecosystem Management

Alta Vista, IA



**Krystal Dingbaum**

Wildlife, Jones County Natural  
Resources Conservation  
Service partnership

Waukon, IA



**Ashley Berkler**

Interpreter, Maquoketa Caves  
State Park

Lytton, IA



**Scott Enger**

Ecosystem Management

Osceola, IA



**Nick Blay**

Interpreter, Lake Manawa  
State Park

Red Oak, IA



**Kari Fisher**

Interpreter, Green Valley State  
Park

Creston, IA



**Scott Boose**

Wildlife, Bremer County  
Natural Resources Conservation  
Service partnership

Evansdale, IA



**Chad Gilles**

Willife, Northeast Iowa  
Resource Conservation and  
Development partnership

Waterloo, IA



**Leah Boyd**

Interpreter, Lake Ahquabi  
State Park

Fort Dodge, IA



**Jennifer Hall**

Ecosystem Management

Lee's Summit, MO



**Allison Bucklew**

Ecosystem Management

Kansas City, MO



**Curt Kemmerer**

Wildlife, Ingham Wildlife  
Unit

Melbourne, IA



**Jenni Determan**

Interpreter, Bellevue State  
Park

Clinton, IA



**Jill Krause**

Interpreter, Clear Lake &  
McIntosh Woods State Parks

Slater, IA





## AmeriCorps Members 2005-2006



### **Jessica Krippel**

Interpreter, Pleasant Creek  
State Recreation Area  
Batavia, IL



### **Jessica Russ**

Interpreter, Backbone State  
Park  
Edgewood, IA



### **Tamra Lewis**

Interpreter, Lake McBride  
State Park  
Iowa City, IA



### **Kate Shank**

Ecosystem Management  
Iowa City, IA



### **Jeremiah Manken**

Wildlife, Boone County Wild-  
life Research Station  
Ogden, IA



### **Tyler Shaver**

Ecosystem Management  
Center Point, IA



### **Stacey Olson**

HUSH Program, Wallace  
State Office Building  
Farwell, MN



### **Sarah West**

Ecosystem Management  
Altoona, IA



### **Christina Rolfes**

Ecosystem Management  
Cedar Rapids, IA



### **Leslie Sheridan**

Interpreter, Mines of Spain  
State Recreation Area  
Dubuque, IA



### **Eric Robley**

Wildlife, Woodbury County  
Natural Resources Conservation  
Service partnership  
Sioux City, IA



### **Esther Young**

Ecosystem Management  
North Augusta, SC